

White
Dolphin

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White Dolphin

Gill Lewis

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

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Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
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First published 2012

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN: 978-0-19-275622-0
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Great Britain

Paper used in the production of this book is a natural,
recyclable product made from wood grown in sustainable forests.
The manufacturing process conforms to the environmental
regulations of the country of origin.

For

Mum and Dad

and for

the *Nerys-Jane*

'A book to be kept for life.'

NAZIA, AGE 11

'This is one of the best books I have ever read . . . I give it 10 out of 10.'

ZAK, AGE 11

'A heart-touching story.'

LYDIA, AGE 11

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PROLOGUE

Each night it is the same. I stand here on the shoreline, curling my toes into cool wet sand. Above, the moon is bright, bright white. It spills light, like a trail of milk upon the water. The dolphin is here again, her pearl-white body curving through the midnight sea. She twists and turns beyond the breaking waves, willing me to follow. But the ocean is vast and black, and I don't know what lies beyond this shore. So I just stand and watch her swim away.

Each night I have this dream. Each night the white dolphin waits for me. But where she goes, I am too afraid to follow.



CHAPTER 1

I rip another page from the book.
I tear it out, right out.

The paper is tissue thin and edged with gold. It flutters in my hand like a tiny bird, desperate to escape. I let it go and watch it fly up into the clear blue sky.

I rip out another, and another. The pages soar and tumble across cow-scattered fields into the haze above the silver-blue sea.

‘Oi, Kara!’

I look down. Jake’s pink face is squinting up at me against the glare of sun. Ethan’s standing next to him trying to find finger-holds in the granite blocks of the wall. He jumps to pull me off, but I pull my legs up out of reach.

The wall’s too high.

CHAPTER 1

I'm safe up here.

'Kara-two-planks,' yells Jake. 'Teacher's looking for you.'

I run my finger along the rough leather binding of the book. It's heavy in my lap. The hard edges dig into my skin. I rip out another page and set it free, soaring upwards, skywards.

'You're in big trouble, Kara-two-planks,' shouts Jake. 'That Bible is school property. You'll be sent to hell for that.'

'She won't get there, though,' calls Ethan. 'She won't be able to read the signs.'

Jake laughs. 'Learnt to spell your name yet, Kara? K-a-r-a W-o-o-d. Kara-thick-as-two-planks-of-wood.'

I've heard all this before, a thousand times. I turn my back on them and look down to the footpath on the far side of the wall. It runs one way to the coast path along the cliffs, and the other, down steps tangled with nettles and bindweed to the harbour in the town below.

'What I want to know,' says Ethan, 'is Kara Wood as thick as her dad?'

'My mum says,' confides Jake, 'that Kara's dad lost his last job because he couldn't write his own name.'

Ethan sniggers.

I spin round and glare at them. 'Shut-up about my dad.'

But Jake's not finished. 'I heard your mum had to write his name for him. Isn't that right, Kara?'

White Dolphin

My eyes burn hot with tears.

‘Who writes his name for him now, Kara?’

I blink hard and turn back to the sea. The waves out there are tipped with white. I feel the hot sun on my face. I mustn’t cry. I won’t let them see me cry. If I ignore them they’ll go away like they always do. The sea breeze is damp and salty. It catches the white cotton of my shirt and billows it out like a spinnaker sail. I close my eyes and imagine I am sailing across an endless sea, a wide blue ocean, with nothing else around me but the sun and wind and sky.

‘Oi, Kara!’

Jake’s still there.

‘It’s a shame about the Merry Mermaid,’ he shouts.

If Jake knows about the Merry Mermaid, then everyone does.

I turn round to look at him.

A few other children from class are watching us from a distance. Chloe and Ella are both looking this way from under the deep shade of the horse-chestnut tree. Adam has stopped his game, his football clutched against his chest.

‘Still,’ Jake says, ‘it never was much of a pub. It’ll make a great holiday home for someone, a rich Londoner probably. I heard the food was terrible.’

Jake knows my dad works in the kitchens of the Merry

CHAPTER 1

Mermaid. He knows he'll have no job and no money to live on when it closes at the end of the summer. Jake would love it if we had to move from Cornwall.

'Maybe your dad can come back and work for mine on our trawlers?' says Jake. 'Tell him we'll be fishing for shellfish when the dredging ban is lifted in ten days' time. My dad's even bought new gear to rake every corner of the seabed out there. He can't wait.'

I just glare at him.

Jake laughs. 'I'll ask him if you can come too.'

I tighten my grip on the Bible's hard leather binding.

Beyond, I see Mrs Carter striding towards us. I could try and hide the book, but Jake and Ethan would tell her anyway.

'Have you seen the advert at the boatyard, Kara?' says Jake. He's looking at me now and grinning. Ethan's grinning too. They know something I don't. It's in Jake's voice and he's bursting to tell me.

Mrs Carter's halfway across the playground. Her face is set and grim.

'The *Moand's* up for sale,' Jake shouts out. He's jubilant now.

I scramble to my feet. 'Liar!'

It can't be true. I'm sure it can't.

White Dolphin

But Jake is smug. He pulls his trump card. 'My dad's going to buy her and chop her up for firewood,' he shouts. 'Cos he says that's all she's good for.'

I hurl the book at him. The Bible's hard edge slams into Jake's nose and he drops like a stone, both hands clutched across his face.

Mrs Carter is running now. 'Kara!'

I glance down at Jake, moaning in the dirt below me.

'Kara, come down, now!' Mrs Carter yells.

But I turn away from them all and jump, leaving Jake Evans bleeding through his fat fingers, turning the dust-dry ground blood red.